An Assessment of Need
For
The Forest Legacy Program in Idaho

"The Forest Legacy Program (FLP), a federal program in partnership with states, supports state efforts to protect environmentally sensitive forest lands. Designed to encourage the protection of privately owned forest lands, FLP is an entirely voluntary program. To maximize the public benefits it achieves, the program focuses on the acquisition of partial interests in privately owned forest lands... It encourages and supports acquisition of conservation easements, legally binding agreements transferring a negotiated set of property rights from one party to another, without removing the property from private ownership. Most FLP conservation easements restrict development, require sustainable forestry practices, and protect other values.

From the Forest Service's "Forest Legacy" website

Introduction

Idaho is the 14th largest state of the United States and certainly one of the most varied, encompassing a land area of 82,750 square miles and a water area of 823 square miles. Elevations range from 733 feet above sea level at Lewiston, on the Snake River in north central Idaho, to it's highest elevation of 12,662 feet at Mt. Borah located in the Lost River Mountain Range in the south central part of the state. In length, Idaho extends from the United States border with Canada in the North to the Nevada/Utah border 479 miles to the South. It borders the states of Oregon and Washington on the west and Montana and Wyoming on the east.

Idaho has three major land regions, (1) the Rocky Mountains, (2) the Columbia Plateau and (3) the Basin and Range region. The Rocky Mountain Region is the largest, extending from the "Panhandle" (the northern tip of Idaho between Washington and Montana) through the center of the state ending on the Wyoming border's juncture with Utah. The Columbia Plateau covers much of Idaho's western border beginning in the Panhandle on the north following the Snake River south and eastward across Snake River Plain. The Basin and Range Region is located in southeastern Idaho adjoining the Utah border.

All four of the world's major biomes are represented in Idaho—arctic alpine, desert, grassland and forest. Average precipitation varies from as much as 80 inches in the mountains of the panhandle to under 8 inches in the deserts of southern Idaho. Statewide, average annual moisture is 16 inches with much of the precipitation in the form of snow. Idaho's average annual temperature is 46 degrees F. but temperatures vary greatly with the elevation. Most of Idaho has a milder climate than the Great Plains states in the same latitude. The Pacific Ocean brings warm sea air to the state, while the high mountains of eastern Idaho offers protection from the cold blasts from Canada and the Great Plains during the winter.

With the exception of the Northern Panhandle, the 1,038 mile long Snake River dominates much of Idaho's geography, economy and biology. The Snake River flows into the state from its source near Yellowstone Park in Wyoming. It crosses the Columbian Plateau region of

southern Idaho, providing water for the state's rich irrigated agricultural industry. It then turns northward providing about a third of the state's western border before leaving the state at Lewiston.

According to the latest survey of the state by the Forest Service, of Idaho's 53.5 million acres, about 22.3 million acres, or 42 percent are forested to some degree. Of this amount, 21.4 million acres, which are stocked with at least 10 percent commercial species, are classified by the Forest Service as "timberland". The remaining forests, 0.9 million acres, lack sufficient stocking to be included in this category and are classified as "woodland".

Federal legislation has reserved a total of 4.3 million acres, or 8 percent of the land area of Idaho for national parks, and monuments, wilderness, and other purposes that preclude most commercial uses of that land. Designated "wilderness", for example, precludes not only logging but also all motorized vehicles and accounts for 93 percent of the Federal reserved land. These reserved lands include 3.8 million acres of timberland, or 18 percent of Idaho's timberland.

Of the remaining 17.6 million acres of Idaho's timberland, nearly 12.8 million acres, or 73 percent is under National Forest Service management, contributing to a federal ownership in the state that exceeds two-thirds of the state's total land mass. Of the remaining 27 percent, 1.5 million acres is managed by the State of Idaho and other public agencies, leaving 3.2 million acres in private ownership1.

Historical Background of Idaho's Forest Products Industry

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the Idaho forest products industry emerged as a major economic force in the state. The industry originally was built on two species—western white and Ponderosa pine. The principle centers of development were in the Panhandle region and west central region of the state. Some of the largest pine sawmills in the country were constructed, which promoted the growth of communities such as; Bonner's Ferry, St Maries, Coeur d'Alene, Lewiston and McCall. Sawmills proliferated throughout the timbered areas of the state, and were common in almost every small community that had access to timber.

As the forest products industry matured and as raw material availability and markets grew, the economies of many local communities became increasingly dependent on the industry. By the middle of the century the industry had reached it's peak. While timber came from a combination of sources, many mill communities were almost exclusively dependent on timber from the public lands, although some of the larger timber companies—Boise Cascade, Potlatch, Plum Creek (originally an offspring of the Northern Pacific Railroad), owned enough timberland to be relatively self-sufficient. But for the smaller, often family owned companies, state and federally managed timberlands were (and remain) extremely important.

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1 Throughout this assessment, the reader may note some differences in acreages reported for private ownerships. This is largely due to the differences in definitions in "timberland", "woodlands" and "forest lands" by different agencies when the data was collected and reported.

By the mid point of the twentieth century the forest products industry was considered second in economic importance to the state, with only agriculture exceeding it. However, passage of federal legislation regarding forest management, endangered species protection and water quality seemed to reflect an increasing national desire to limit the amount of timber harvested from federal lands, and, beginning in the late 1980's national forest timber sales began a steep decline. Without that timber, it became increasingly difficult to sustain the vitality of the forest products industry in the state, and a number of mills dependent on Federal lands for timber were gradually forced to close down. The survivors were limited to those who either owned or had access to state or private sources of timber.

Many of Idaho's former timber-dependent communities now found themselves desperately trying to find ways to replace the economic benefits lost due to the demise of the timber industry. Often, the options are limited. The greatest advantage most of these communities have is the natural environment of the forested areas in which they are located. Many communities are attempting a transition to a tourist-based economy, using forest recreation, hunting and fishing to replace the lost timber jobs, with varying degrees of success.

Demographic and Population Changes

Idaho has experienced one of the fastest population growth rates in the country during the past decade, but that growth has been unevenly distributed in the state. The population increases have been almost exclusively been centered in urban areas, such as Boise and its environs or in areas of high tourism, including the Sun Valley/Ketchum and Coeur d'Alene. For the most part rural counties dependent on natural resource based industry or agriculture have not shared in that growth, with a few actually declining in population. The U.S. Census indicates that the urban population of Idaho has grown from 40% at mid-twentieth century to about 60% today.

This pattern of population growth coupled with an increase in part time residents in the state is resulting in increased pressure on forestland and other lands of scenic beauty to be developed for residential or recreational use. Private forestland represents a limited part of the state's land area and in many cases includes some the most desirable sites for development. The type of development will determine the future use of this class of land, but most development forever alters the ability of the land to be managed for continuous harvests of timber and for the wildlife or watershed values generally associated with those lands.

All this means that changes in the traditional life style and employment of the current residents of Idaho will be inevitable as will be changes in land uses and management. As residences and recreational homes are built on small forest acreages, protection from fire and insect will become more difficult. Traditional forest management will decline and pre-commercial and commercial harvesting will be restricted. Equally important, public access to private lands will become more limited. Open public access to private forestland, particularly industrial lands, has been a tradition in Idaho. Hunters, fishers, and recreationists of all sorts, have relied on public access to enjoy their various pleasures.

These changes and the challenges as well as the opportunities they present are not lost on Idaho's private forest landowners. As Idaho's forest products industry continues to decline as a part of the state's economy, private forest landowners are faced with increasing pressure to seek and maintain acceptable returns from their timberlands. Those owning forestlands with higher value for residential, scenic, or recreational use perceive development opportunities

that far outstrip the economic rewards of managing their lands for the long term production of timber.

Potlatch Corporation and Boise Cascade, for example, are two of Idaho's largest private timberland owners. Both hold lands with high values for development as well as timberlands with areas of prime habitat for big game and high quality watersheds. Both are also a large integrated forest products companies that have historically managed their lands for long-term production of timber, and remains committed to maintaining their "working" forests. However, Boise Cascade has now closed all its mills in Idaho and neither company can justifiably ignore the economic opportunities posed by the value that some of their lands have for development.

Throughout Idaho's timbered areas, the threat to traditional life styles and livelihoods is palpable. Jobs as loggers or sawmill workers, which at one time would support a family with a comfortable income, are increasingly scarce. While many, perhaps most, of the economic and demographic changes that are reducing the importance of Idaho's forest product industry are likely inevitable, there is some ability to protect the remaining private land base upon which not only the timber industry relies upon, but also wildlife and recreationists which also rely upon these same lands. The Forest Legacy Program will provide Idaho an added and valuable tool for motivating the private forestland owners of the state to help protect the values and benefits that society derives from forested lands.